



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Bloomington, Edina and Richfield and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota join forces to create Minnesota's first healthy 'do.<sup>®</sup> towns'**

EAGAN, Minn., Sept. 27, 2011 – The mayors of Bloomington, Edina and Richfield, and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross) today launched an 18-month project to improve the health of their communities by making changes that support healthy eating and active living choices.

The initiative, called “**do.town**,” focuses on preventing illness caused by unhealthy eating and physical inactivity, which combined are the second leading cause of death and disease in Minnesota.

The mayors of Bloomington, Edina and Richfield announced **do.town** today at a meeting of community leaders from across the three cities. The goal of the **do.town** initiative is to make the communities places where the healthy choice is the easy choice — giving residents more opportunities to eat right, get physical activity and create healthier homes, schools and workplaces.

“We believe healthy communities are strong communities, but barriers to healthy living are everywhere,” said Edina Mayor James B. Hovland. “To help our residents succeed in being active and eating well, we needed a partner with proven expertise in helping people by making their surroundings — where they live, work and play — healthier. We’re fortunate Blue Cross is willing to join us in this exciting pilot project.”

The **do.town** initiative builds off the success of Blue Cross’ popular **do.** Campaign, which encourages people to “groove your body every day” by moving more and eating better — as well as the numerous healthy initiatives that are currently under way in each of the cities. The project begins with outreach and listening sessions in each community. The goal is to better understand what barriers residents and leaders believe currently exist and then help all three communities make the changes that can help community members easily make healthy choices a part of their daily lives. Examples might be working to make biking or walking to school safer; helping improve access to healthy foods at work, school and in faith organizations; or allowing for more community gardens to help serve people with low incomes. The options are numerous and each city will determine what changes and improvements make the most sense for them to tackle.

Unhealthy eating and physical inactivity take an enormous toll on quality of life and our pocketbooks. They contribute to preventable diseases and conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. For example, two-thirds of adult Minnesotans are overweight or obese, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. If trends continue unchecked, Blue Cross found treating obesity-related diseases will add nearly \$3.7 billion to Minnesota’s annual health care costs by 2020.

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“We are very excited to be a part of this initiative,” said Kathy Mock, senior vice president, marketing and public and health affairs, Blue Cross. “Blue Cross has a long history of working hand in hand with Minnesotans to improve health. Whether it’s reducing the harms of tobacco through a statewide smoke-free law or bringing Nice Ride Minnesota to Minneapolis and St. Paul so everyone has a healthy way to get around, we’re creating a movement where the healthy choice becomes the easier choice. The mayors of Bloomington, Edina and Richfield have demonstrated great leadership in stepping up to guide their communities on a journey of health, and we’re excited to see what can be accomplished.”

“To make sustainable health improvements, it will require changes in how we operate — looking at decisions we make in our cities, schools, workplaces and elsewhere through a health lens,” said Gene Winstead, mayor of Bloomington. “We’ve been able to do some of this through State Health Improvement Program funding in all three of our communities, but through this public-private collaboration, we hope to engage more community members in order to make more changes more quickly.”

Richfield Mayor Debbie Goettel noted that the success of **do.town** will be determined by wide community participation. “The best solutions come from our community members. We will need input and involvement from a variety of groups in the community, from schools, workplaces and neighborhoods to the faith community, civic organizations and health providers, in order to bring health to every corner of our communities. It will truly be a grass-roots effort.”

The **do.town** organizers will start with community outreach in October and continue through the fall. Residents can visit **do-town.org** to sign up to get involved or receive updates.

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*Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, with headquarters in the St. Paul suburb of Eagan, was chartered in 1933 as Minnesota’s first health plan and continues to carry out its charter mission today: to promote a wider, more economical and timely availability of health services for the people of Minnesota. A nonprofit, taxable organization, Blue Cross is the largest health plan based in Minnesota, covering 2.7 million members in Minnesota and nationally through its health plans or plans administered by its affiliated companies. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, headquartered in Chicago. Go to [bluecrossmn.com](http://bluecrossmn.com) to learn more about Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. Each Blue Cross and Blue Shield plan is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.*